

Spring 2011

Claiming MANASLU: The Agency of a Rural Community in Nepal's Developing Mountain Tourism Industry

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SIT Study Abroad

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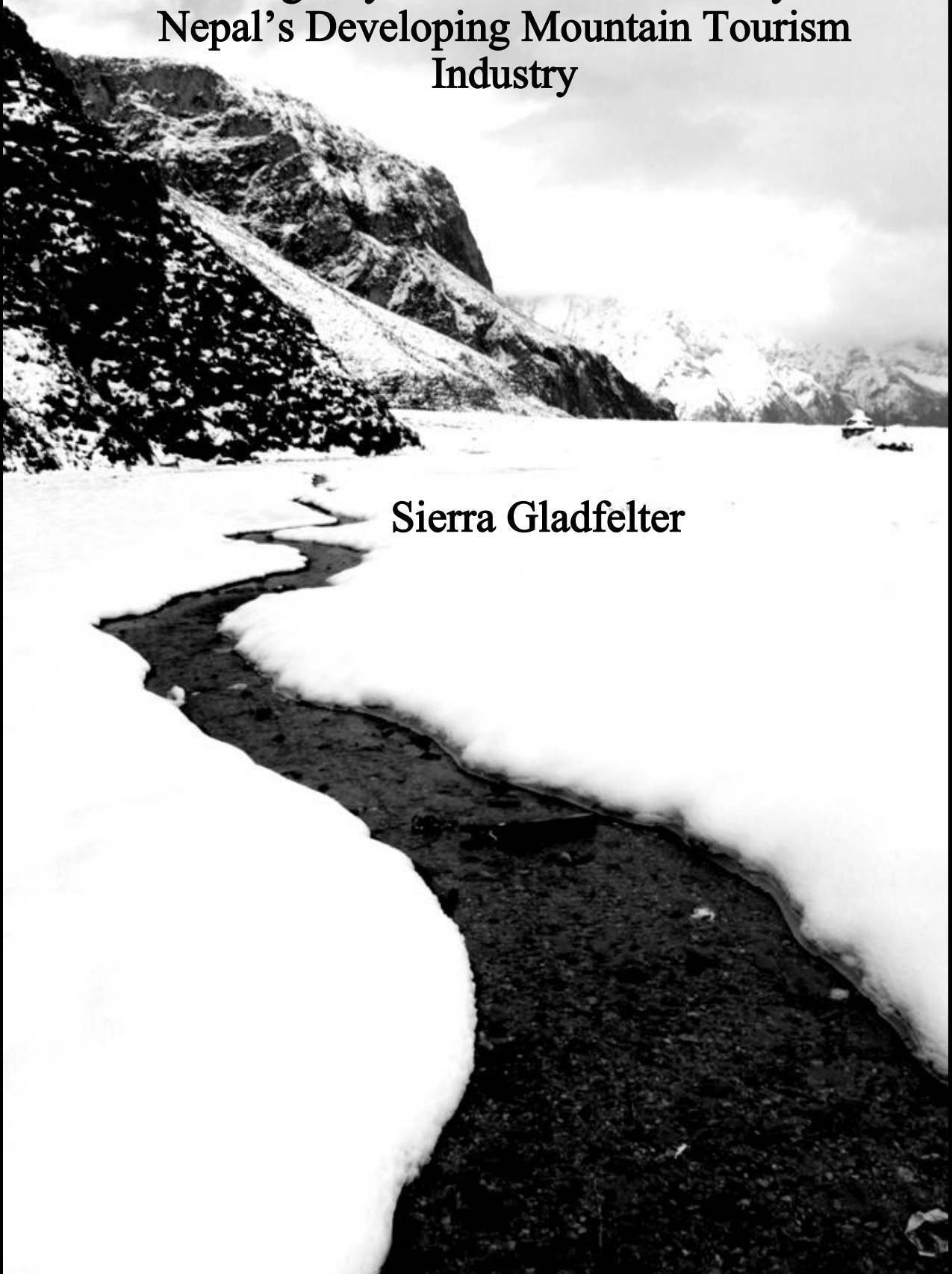
Gladfelter, Sierra, "Claiming MANASLU: The Agency of a Rural Community in Nepal's Developing Mountain Tourism Industry" (2011). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 1062.
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CLAIMING MANASLU:

The Agency of a Rural Community in
Nepal's Developing Mountain Tourism
Industry

Sierra Gladfelter



**CLAIMING MANASLU:
The Agency of a Rural Community in Nepal's Developing Mountain
Tourism Industry**



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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Nepal: Tibetan and
Himalayan Peoples, SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2011

Abstract:

Due to the commoditization of Everest's summit and road construction around Annapurna, adventure tourists drawn to Nepal for wilderness and „authentic“ village experiences are increasingly seeking more remote destinations like the Manaslu Circuit, which only opened to trekkers in 1991. The trekkers and mountaineers who travel such routes play a crucial role in ushering in the development of remote regions and reshaping the face of previously isolated villages. As agencies, nonprofits and community organizations design and market these alternative treks with the noble goal of alleviating poverty in rural Nepal, there is often a disconnect between those promoting the destination and the needs of the communities that live along the path.

The village of Samagaun sits at the base of Mt. Manaslu, the world's eighth highest peak, and is positioned along the rapidly-developing Manaslu Circuit. Even as the community struggles to accommodate the growing number of trekkers and mountain climbers visiting their region, the village remains largely consumed with a subsistence lifestyle, and their participation in the expanding mountaineering and trekking industries has remained limited. This paper documents Samagaun's perspective as a Himalayan village facing rapid change, its present participation in the outdoor tourism industry, and the needs of the community regarding physical and social infrastructure before they can become active agents in the orchestration of their own development.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support and assistance of numerous individuals. Pasang Dolma, my Research Assistant and Translator during my two weeks in Samagaun offered incredible insight into life in the village. She shared her family, friends and home with me, and without her constant presence my research in the Manaslu region would have been much less fruitful. Pasang's uncle, Ngodup Gyelzen was an incredible resource from the moment I took my first step on the trek into Samagaun. He literally walked five days down the valley and took a bus to Kathmandu just to pick me up and guide me into the village. During my two week stay in Samagaun, his guesthouse and family's kitchen became my home, and it was a pleasure to get to know him so well. Bir Bahadur Lama, the Head Master at the Shreee Guari Shankar Primary School and owner of Manaslu Hotel, offered invaluable insight into all aspects of community life in Samagaun and was patient in explaining current systems of outdoor tourism and answering my follow-up questions. Finally, the amazing community that lives in Samagaun and the people all along the Manaslu Circuit were a constant inspiration during my time in the region. It was a gift to share a small piece of their lives, and I hope that my paper demonstrates how much potential they have to create an even brighter and more sustainable future for the Manaslu region.

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Introduction: The Appeal of Manaslu

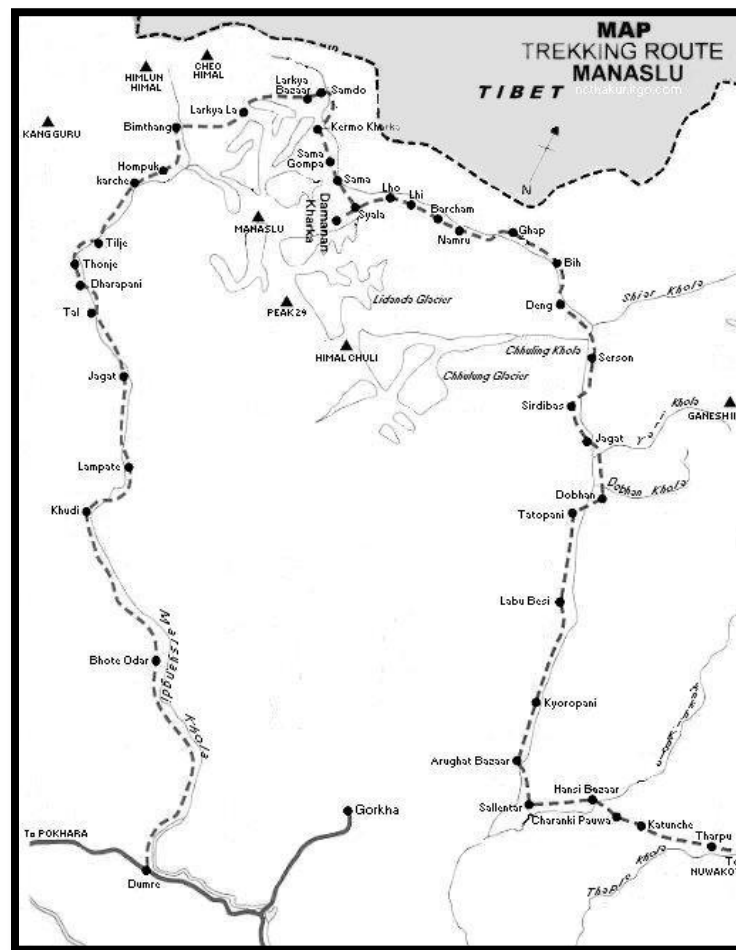
Due to the commoditization of Everest's summit and road construction around the Annapurna Circuit, adventure tourists drawn to Nepal for wilderness and „authentic“ village experiences are increasingly seeking more remote destinations. The Manaslu Circuit is one such trek that is gaining in popularity due to the allure of neighboring Tibet and the region's pristine mountain environment.ⁱ Closed to tourists until 1991, this Manaslu region is still considered a restricted area with heavy permits to enter.ⁱⁱ Nonetheless, adventure seekers willing to pay to get off the heavily beaten tourist path, have made the Manaslu Circuit a popular alternative to the adjacent and internationally renowned Annapurna Circuit.ⁱⁱⁱ



Samagaun is a six-day trek from the nearest road in Nepal and less than a day's walk from Tibet.

The border village of Samagaun, where I lived for two weeks, investigating the current status of outdoor tourism in the region, is located on the upper crest of the Manaslu Circuit at the base of Mt. Manaslu (8163 meters), the world's eighth highest peak.^{iv} Not only a hub for mountaineer

expeditions who hope to climb an 8,000-meter peak without the crowds and expense of Everest, Samagaun also functions as an important stopover for trekkers acclimating to the higher altitudes of the Manaslu Circuit. The major trekking seasons are between March-May and September to November.^v Throughout these months, all trekking groups spend an additional day in Samagaun before attempting to cross Larkya La Pass (5,160 meters) and link with the Annapurna Conservation Area's Manang District to complete the second half of the circuit.^{vi}



Despite its position as a growing hot-spot for outdoor tourism, Samagaun is a village where most people remain largely consumed with a subsistence lifestyle.^{vii} Most households sustain themselves by growing barley and potatoes for three months of the summer and trading with Tibet and the villages in the lower valley the rest of the year.^{viii} Although faced with a growing

influx of tourists, without access to an education above grade six or resources to develop their own entrepreneurship skills, villagers maintain a limited involvement in the tourism industry that it is expanding rapidly around them. During my stay in this community, I studied the challenges facing this rural community's tourism industry and its needs regarding physical and social infrastructure before villagers can become active agents in the orchestration of their own community's development.



A yak and zho drink from a fountain in a neighboring village along the Manaslu Circuit.

The Tourism Frontier and Pioneers in Development

The tourists who participate in outdoor tourism play a crucial role in ushering in the development of remote regions like Manaslu, and reshaping the face of previously isolated villages.^{ix} Because trekkers and mountaineers tend to be attracted to undeveloped areas, they are often the first visitors that make a region popular.^x As more and more visitors are drawn to the

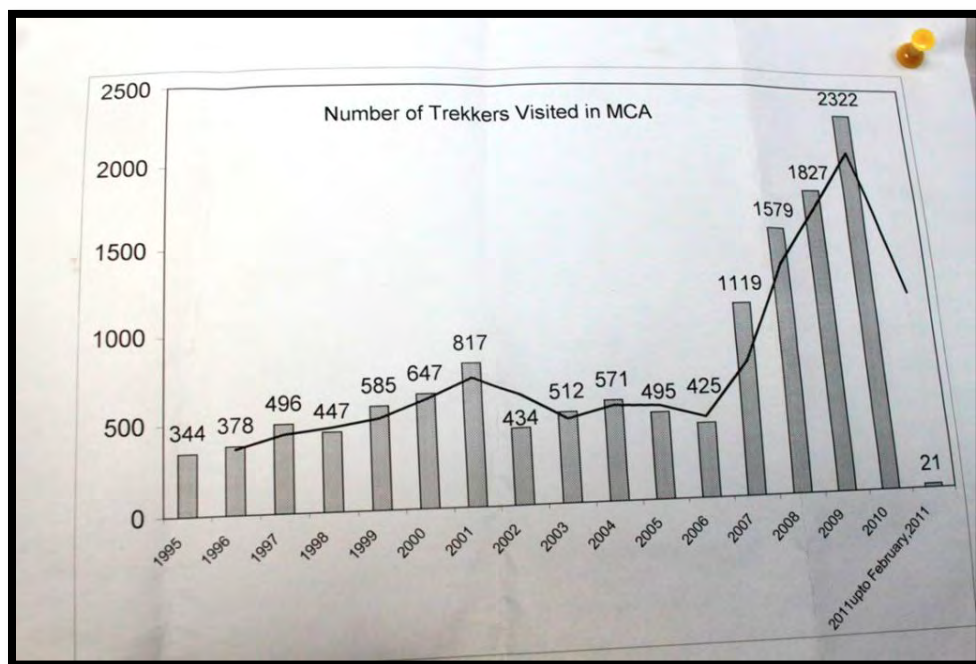
location, they usher in more permanent infrastructure to accommodate their masses like roads, guesthouses, and teashops. This development has the potential to cause highly-trafficked regions to erode in their initial appeal as “remote” and “authentic” destinations, causing trekkers to push deeper into even less developed regions.^{xi}

The Manaslu Circuit is a trek that exemplifies this phenomenon. The majority of the trekkers that I interviewed along the trail to Samagaun admitted that they chose to backpack the Manaslu Circuit specifically because they were not interested in trekking the “Annapurna Highway,” as the neighboring circuit has infamously come to be called. The Annapurna Circuit has been the most popular trek in Nepal for a long time, but its fame has finally caught up with it.^{xii} Now that there are teashops strung out every few kilometers, with standardized meals and shops selling coke and candy bars, it is no longer „cool enough“ for adventure seekers who want to feel like they are escaping the Western world. The harder it is to get to, the better.

While I sit on a hillside with my guide, resting on our trek into Samagaun, a helicopter drones overhead. It is going to the village, cutting through the fog to deliver goods to mountaineers on the neck of Mt. Manaslu. “It’s funny,” my guide Ngodup chuckles. “We walk five days and that helicopter reaches Samagaun from Kathmandu in one hour.”^{xiii} Yet it is this inaccessibility that draws trekkers to the Manaslu Circuit in the first place.



Despite its remoteness, the Manaslu Region has seen growing numbers of tourists in the past few years, and in just the first two and a half months of 2011, the police check post in Samagaun documented 1,500 trekkers and mountaineers visiting Manaslu.^{xiv} “Nepal is changing with the tourists,” claims a trekker from Austria who has been visiting Nepal for over thirty years to trek in the most remote regions of the Himalayas. She is in the Manaslu region visiting the Tsum Valley which only opened to tourists three years ago.^{xv}



Scholars of tourism like Zurick would argue that travelers like this Austrian tourist become the primary agents in pushing the tourism frontier further into the region's periphery.^{xvi} These tourists identify regions that are still largely unexplored and attempt to visit them before they are discovered by the masses. However, in the process, they become the forerunners of development and the rising numbers that follow in their footsteps put pressure on current infrastructure and prompt the development of teahouses and guesthouses and usher in other services along the new trekking route.^{xvii} Before you know it, you are walking another „Annapurna Highway.“

In just the last ten years, the road from Kathmandu that brings tourists into Manaslu has been extended an additional 10 kilometers from Arughat.^{xviii} It is now possible to take a jeep taxi the extra distance for 150 rupees a person. There are several entrepreneurs who have made a small fortune in this business shuttling tourists back and forth who are uninterested in walking a dusty dirt road.

While getting my trekking permit checked at the Manaslu Conservation Area Office in Philim, I interview Bhim Prasad Upadhyay who is an officer in Manaslu but also has fourteen years of experience working in Annapurna. When I mention the road construction and ask if he thinks it could eventually kill tourism in the lower part of the valley, he says only one thing, “Ten years ago, Annapurna was like what Manaslu is today.”^{xix}

Even as I trek in to Samagaun, my guide Ngodup who has trekked up and down this valley for over forty years never stops reiterating how much the route has changed since he was young. “Eight to nine years ago you couldn't even find tea here,” he exclaims. “Now you can find everything.”^{xx} Samagaun only received phone service twelve years ago, but now Ngodup's phone shop which was the first in town, always has locals lingering in front of the little wooden

booth where the two phones run from cords into his storage room.^{xxi} The locals stand, dial and redial trying to get a connection with a cell phone in Kathmandu. They step aside when a tourist arrives to make a phone call to a loved one in Europe or the United States. In this way, adventure tourism functions not only as an alternative to other forms of touring, but the initial phase in an evolving tourist economy.^{xxii}

The Role of Tourism Promoters

At least within the context of Nepal, the majority of the organizations that promote tourism in rural communities like Samagaun, are based in Kathmandu with little contact or experience with the needs of the populations that actually live in these destinations. For example, in 2006, the Dutch development agency SNV and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development [proposed](#) the development of the Great Himalaya Trail (GHT), which traverses the Himalayas through India, Nepal and Bhutan.^{xxiii} Their goal is to design a route through coordinated, inter-agency efforts that directly benefits the 1.8 million people living in the Himalayas’ most remote villages such as Samagaun where the trail passes on a portion of the Manaslu Circuit.^{xxivxxv}



Although such tourism campaigns have noble goals of alleviating poverty in rural Nepal, there is often a disconnect between those selling the destination to international tourists and the community members who are supposed to benefit from the growing wave of tourists. “The Ministry is working on this,” Mim Hamal, a representative from SNV assures me when I interview him in Kathmandu about progress made on the route.^{xxvi} When I ask how rural communities along the route have been involved in the process, he admits that they have not. “The government is taking the lead with the implementation of the trail. We don’t need any pressure from any international organizations or local people.”

As expected, throughout my time in Samagaun and along the Manaslu Circuit the only individuals that I interviewed who had even heard of the Great Himalayan Trail were guides from companies that worked from Kathmandu. In addition, the only effort I saw to raise awareness in the communities along the trail was one poster taped to the concrete wall of a hotel in Soti Khola, a village that ironically is days south of the Great Himalayan Trail actual route.

This demonstrates the need for agencies, nonprofits and organizations that design initiatives like the Great Himalayan Trail to ensure that their proposals are applicable in the communities they serve. In order to win the respect of rural communities that often have little contact with the decision makers in urban offices, outreach efforts must demonstrate that projects are sensitive to the real needs of the village and empower local people to participate in the development of their own community.

Management under the Manaslu Conservation Area Project

Nepal has at least attempted to facilitate such an exchange between local communities and government agencies through the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) which was

established in 1982 as an autonomous, non-profit and non-governmental organization to work in the field of nature conservation in Nepal.^{xxvii} The Trust's mission is to promote, manage and conserve nature whereby people are both the principle actors and beneficiaries.^{xxviii} The Manaslu Conservation Area was handed over to NTNC's management by the Nepali Government until 2018, and it now works with seven Village District Committees (including one in Samagaun) which are contained within this vast region of over 1,663 square miles.^{xxix} Tourism has become the most enticing and problematic business in much of the Third World, yet Nepal is among the first nations to set aside territory to be controlled in such an environmental, local and naturally positive manner.^{xxx}



Because Samagaun and the villages along the Manaslu Circuit are managed by the National Trust for Nature Conservation, the development and expansion of tourism is inherently linked to this organization based in Kathmandu. For trekkers to access this region they must pay 2,000 rupees to the National Trust for Nature Conservation and a US\$50 fee for their first week in the region and an additional \$7 per day to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation for extending their stay.^{xxxi} While these restrictions restrain the local communities from developing

outside the MCAP guidelines, at the same time the limitations may also contribute to a more thoughtfully orchestrated process of development. The 2,000 rupee entrance fee that is collected by NTNC is supposed to go directly toward supporting conservation efforts and development in the region, but there is much tension in villages along the circuit over how effective the return is of these resources going back into the community.



All trekkers who visit the Manslu Conservation Area must have their permits checked at offices along the route.

In 1997, NTNC implemented the Manaslu Eco-tourism Development Project in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation and the Asian Development Bank.^{xxxii} After the region had opened to tourism in 1991, the ecosystem had been placed under severe environmental pressure. Informed by its experience and lessons learned developing the Annapurna Conservation Area, the Eco-tourism Development Project was implemented to deliver tangible benefits from tourism to the local people of Manaslu while assisting them in minimizing the negative impacts on their environment and culture.^{xxxiii}

Even still, the partnership between NTNC and the local community has resulted in some very progressive initiatives and projects over the years that have contributed to positive development in the community. Dharke Tsering Hiraghan, a Samagaun native and owner of a guesthouse

currently under construction in the village, worked as a Community Mobilizer for MCAP for seven years,^{xxxiv} and also served on the board of the Village District Committee, where he was responsible for distributing money from NTNC to projects initiated by the village and the four VCDs of Gorkha. Through MCAP, most villages in the valley now have either solar panels or micro hydropower providing them with electricity, clean drinking water sources, and community toilets.^{xxxv} It is these projects that build positive relationships with the communities, but unfortunately the community development projects are also the first thing to get cut when politics shift in Kathmandu and less money is able to be invested in the villages.^{xxxvi}

“Funding is sooo limited,” laments Bhim Prasad Upadhyay, an officer stationed in the Manaslu region to facilitate community activism. He recognizes that without these „gifts“ to the community that build rapport, relationships erode and villagers begin to resist the presence of a regulatory agency that is unable to give the people what they ask for.



Stone pavements and a community toilet installed with funding from MCAP in villages along the circuit.

Despite the fact that the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) has worked for decades with the communities in the Manaslu Conservation Area, for the past five to six years there has been conflict between the people of Manaslu and those who manage the region at MCAP.^{xxxvii} “We say let’s conserve. The community says, „let’s develop“” Rata Raj Timsina,

Program Officer at NTNC shares when I visit the main office in Kathmandu.^{xxxviii} He says the Trust worries that the flow of tourists will reverse if unchecked development occurs in Manaslu, similarly to how the road construction in Annapurna has begun to kill tourism in the villages along the new road, but the local people are not concerned. It's a balancing act, Timsina admits.

Many villagers, however, feel pinned under the control of MCAP, unable to even harvest wood to fuel their cooking fires in higher regions around Samagaun. "MCAP says this is a restricted area, but there is no reason. It's no different!" a villager from Samagaun vents. "This is a business trick. They think local people have no knowledge."^{xxxix}

"MCAP should change their ideas, but it is not bad," shares Bir Bahadur Lama, an active community member of Samagaun who also served for ten years on the local branch of the Manaslu Conservation Area Management Committee.^{xl} "Coordination is most important. People need to press MCAP for money for projects, not just complain." He insists that if MCAP was not here, then this region could be made a National Park. "Then village people really couldn't do anything," Bir Bahadur exclaims. "There would be two times the rules as MCAP. MCAP is important, it still gives us freedom."

Community Agency within MCAP

Ultimately it is the communities who have direct contact with the industry, who must recognize their ability to design sustainable models that fold income back into their communities without compromising the natural and social environments they directly depend on. "Village people know that they destroy the environment," insists Ula Jigme Lama, Committee President of the Sama shouldn't Development Foundation.^{xli} While the conservation role of MCAP is useful, it does not necessarily know what is best for the community. It is up to the people who

live in villages like Samagaun to forge relationships with the tourists who frequent their region and not depend on agencies like MCAP to build the framework for them. “Villagers must understand what tourists want,” Ula Jigme insists, “And tourists must understand what villagers need.”

One such organization that has been proactive in linking villagers directly with the international tourist community and promoting trekking along the Manaslu Circuit is the Nubri Culture and Youth Promotion Committee. This committee was established in 2009 by the inhabitants of the Gorkha District and actively promotes culture, religion and tourism in the region through programs hosted along the Manaslu Circuit and at their outreach office in Kathmandu.^{xlii} In just the past two years, they have already produced three documentaries in both English and Nepali about the Manaslu area and hosted journalists on a 21-day trek throughout the region. Their goal was to publicize the villages in the Nubri Region as not only stops on a circuit trek, but destinations worthy of spending some time in.^{xliii} The first two years of the organization’s efforts will culminate in the Manaslu Festival on May 9-11 in conjunction with the Nepal Tourism Year 2011, which they have been promoting extensively throughout the Gorkha District and Kathmandu trekking community.

Trends in the number of trekkers and mountaineers visiting the Manaslu Region, insure that Samagaun will be a hot-spot for a growing outdoor tourism and long -distance trekking industry for years to come. Regardless if nonprofits and government agencies are ineffective at linking their campaigns to the hosting communities, newly-founded organizations like the Nubri Culture and Youth Promotion Committee are taking their future into their own hands.

“You can’t blame the government, you can’t blame the NGOs,” asserts Sunil Tamang, a student who grew up in the Nepal’s trekking industry and is currently in the middle of a solo trek across the country to raise awareness about climate change and promote sustainable tourism in the Himalayas.^{xliv} “You must initiate sustainable tourism yourself. Many people say the government rules us, but it’s not true. We rule ourselves.”

The Trekking Industry in Samagaun

Even though trekkers continue to flow through the village of Samagaun in growing numbers, it does not mean that a system is in place to automatically feed money directly into the local economy. After all as Britton asserts, “tourism is not the great economic leveler as its promoters believe it to be, nor does it necessarily provide sustainable forms of international development.”^{xlv}

When trekkers first began to venture into the Manaslu Region two decades ago there was no infrastructure to accommodate their needs. Bringing the majority, if not all, of their supplies and food with them from Kathmandu, without infrastructure in place to depend on, the expeditions had to be self-sufficient and therefore did little more than hand over a few rupees to set up their tents in a villager’s fields. In Samagaun, organized groups would camp in the fields around the monastery on the hill behind the village. While this was not a problem initially, soon an increasing number of groups began to disrespect the site, leaving rubbish that the monks would have to clean up the following morning. Guides, inquiring about where they could find local potatoes to cook for their clients’ dinner, would interrupt lamas performing *puja* and other rituals in the monastery.^{xlvi}



The field behind Samagaun's monastery that the first camping groups stayed at before infrastructure was developed in the village.

Such behavior became a disruption to community life, and eventually Village District Committee Chairman at the time, Bir Bahadur approached MCAP and expressed the need to build a community campsite below the monastery. This campsite would accommodate large groups of organized trekkers in the lower village, and the money generated from the fees to use the space would go toward renovating the monastery. The monks would be given responsibility for managing the campsite and MCAP, fully supporting the initiative, funded its construction nine years ago.

Long before the number of tourists had become a problem, Bir Bahadur had been hosting smaller groups of trekkers in his family's home, but eventually this became impossible to maintain. Seventeen years ago, he built a formal guesthouse to accommodate the tourists, and the Mount Manaslu Hotel, became the first guesthouse constructed in Samagaun. For many years, the Manaslu Hotel was the only guesthouse available to trekkers until other villagers watching Bir Buhdur's success as a tourism pioneer in the village began to build hotels of their own. "They looked at my guesthouse and realized that this is the way to make money."^{xlvi}

In 2005, Ngodup Gyelzen constructed the Norbu Lodge and Campsite which was the second guesthouse to open in town.^{xlvi} A few years later the Samagaun Hotel and Lodge Campsite opened its doors.^{xli} In just this past year, three new lodges and campsites are under construction. Two currently exist as overflow campsites and are prepared to open their doors as lodges in the next few months.



Each year as more guesthouses are built along the Manaslu Circuit, more and more trekkers are opting to stay in teahouses. Carrying lighter packs, these tourists eat their meals at lodges and restaurants along the way,¹ allowing a greater amount of money to trickle into the local economy of villages than through the original systems of organized camping. Although this growing system of tea house trekking decentralizes revenue throughout rural villages along the trail, there is still the challenge of designing systems that allow a greater percentage of the population to participate and share in these benefits. Even though in almost every village along the Manaslu Circuit, one can find several lodges under construction, it is crucial to remember that the whole village does not benefit from a guesthouse. Only the few individuals who can afford the investment make any money off of the trekkers. But even they often shoulder years of debt from

its construction, since wood and materials for construction must be hauled by porter and mule from Kathmandu.



A caravan of pack mules crosses the valley to deliver goods to Samagaun sitting in the distance.

Samagaun's inaccessibility is also a challenge to the village's development and limits the community's agency since they have little contact or ability to communicate with agencies based in Kathmandu or market their businesses to international tourists. Located a six-days' walk into the heart of the Manaslu Conservation Area, the people of Samagaun are often stuck on the receiving end of the tourism industry, limited to hosting whatever trekkers arrive through outside agencies even if they are organized camping groups with all their own gear.

Village Geography and the Pressure to Develop

As guesthouses continue to be built in Samagaun, the village's physical geography has shifted based on those participating in the tourism industry. Samagaun is now divided into an

upper and lower village. The lower section is where families have lived for 1000s of years in elevated stone houses with animal pens underneath their homes. However, the upper part of the village, where all the guesthouses are constructed in close proximity, is only 5-6 years old since tourism has prompted more accommodation for tea house trekkers.^{li}



Four guesthouses that are currently accommodating trekkers and mountaineers in Samagaun.

Inevitably this change in village geography has also shifted power dynamics as those who can afford to build and manage guesthouses now live in the upper part of town, while the majority of the population still dependent on subsistence farming lives „downtown.“ When I ask why the guesthouses were built above the historical village, my translator Pasang Dolma states simply, “Because it is cleaner and more peaceful.”^{lii} This physical division highlights the disparity between those who benefit from the trekking industry and those who are left outside of the system.



During rain, the lower village gets muddy as animals are herded into stables under each home.

In the lower part of the village where families inherit land through ancient links of kinship, the exchange of property happens through a contract with the original owner. However, in the upper part of the village which historically was communal grazing land for yaks and zhos, the entire village decides on its distribution and sale. In order to construct a building whether for personal use or for accommodating tourists, one must request land from the head of the ward, who then raises the request at the next village meeting. The entire community discusses if the individual is worthy of land, and if the request is granted, each plot costs a one-time fee of 1500 rupees which goes directly into the VDC account.

However, the land in the upper village has for the most part already been divvied up among the village's 100 families three years ago.^{liii} With the land now out of the guiding hands of the VDC, new regulations and building codes may have to be instituted to ensure that individuals develop the upper region of Samagaun responsibly.

On the other hand, the land lying above the guesthouses and below the hill that the monastery sits on, will never be developed. This area is considered part of the religious community and has always been kept separate and „above“ the lower life of the village. Ironically, this is the very land where the first groups of organized trekkers camped and ultimately inspired Bir Bahadur to request MCAP to build the community campsite, one of the first steps of tourism development in the village. In this sense, tradition might actually help to protect the community from unsustainable sprawl and unchecked development as guesthouses continue to build up in Samagaun where land is limited and obtained through complex systems of inheritance and village approval.

Similarly, the village practice of rarely granting property to outsiders unless they marry into the village, demonstrates Samagaun's deep roots to the land and commitment to community. This territorial tradition and resistance to „outsider“ domination may be what keeps the money generated from tourism in the local community's hands. Even if they are not yet fully tapping the capacity of the tourism industry, at least their ancient systems may protect their access, so that foreign entrepreneurs do not have the space to come in and mine the money from underneath them before the villagers are able to get on their feet.

Community Tension over Guesthouse Construction by Outsiders

At a village meeting hosted at the Shree Guari Shankar Primary School, the people of Samagaun discussed a man from Labu who has been constructing a guesthouse in Dharamsala, the last resting place for trekkers before they ascend Larkya La Pass.^{liv} He has already built a similar twenty-room guesthouse in the village of Deng, which has been highly controversial in the lower region of the valley.



Villagers discuss the construction of a new guesthouse in Deng that is being built by an outsider.

The Tibetan refugee village of Samdo, which is a three hour walk up the valley, owns the land in Dharamsala and has agreed to lease the land to this „outsider“ for the construction of his guesthouse. The tension is due to the fact that the people of Samagaun were not consulted or involved in this business relationship, despite the fact that Samdo has three wards that fall under Samagaun’s VDC. This means that Samdo and Samagaun share the same policies and budget regardless of the fact that they are separate villages with different (and at time, conflicting) interests.

The guesthouse is already built and running, but tension still brews. Samagaun’s residents remain frustrated that they were cut out of the loop, and when leaders of Samagaun requested to meet directly with the builder in Kathmandu, he refused to speak with them. Over the past six months, the people of Samdo have been arranging this business deal directly with the builder and high officials of the Manaslu Conservation Area without contact or dialogue with the rest of the

Village District Committee. Rather than going to both communities, the 30 percent of the profit that Samdo receives for leasing the land will fold back into Samdo through a separate bank account and Samagaun will get nothing.^{lv} As the meeting ends at the school, the Samagaun villagers get riled up, shouting angrily across the room. Although I cannot understand their words, their rage radiates through the room. My translator Pasang whispers that the people are announcing that they are ready to resort to violence if need be.

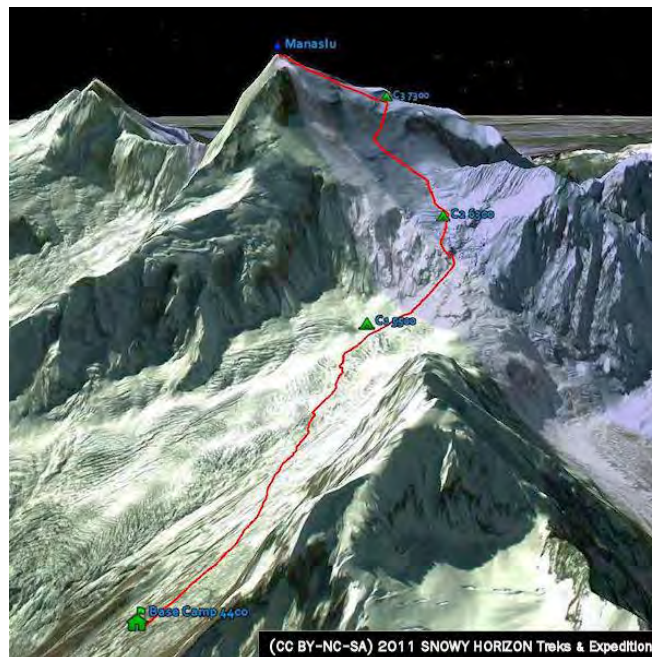
When I visit Samdo a few weeks later, I gain a very different perspective from the community members whom I talk to there. Chodak, a Tibetan teacher in the local school shares the feelings of the people of Samdo regarding the new guesthouse in Dharamsala. “People are poor here [in Samdo] and can’t build big guesthouses.”^{lvi} By leasing the land to an „outsider“ and claiming 30 percent of the profit, the people are marketing their location, while also attempting to tap into the income generated from the guesthouse.

It is evident that the community is acutely aware of the potential of such development, but recognizing their limitations, is looking for alternatives that will allow them to build up a monetary base to invest in their own development initiatives. This is Samdo trying to assert its own agency and independence from Samagaun, and claim a larger piece of the pie for its own people. “Samdo is not upset,” Chodak laughs, “but Sama is.” Since the guesthouse’s construction a year ago, Samdo has already raked in 200,000 rupees in profit.

Samagaun’s Mountaineering Industry

Despite the fact that there are many more trekkers circulating through Samagaun than there are climbers who scale Mt. Manaslu, it is the mountaineering industry that has been more successful at benefiting a greater proportion of the community. This has not always been the case

however, as originally villagers did not even allow mountaineering on their mountain. A Japanese team of climbers made the first serious attempt to scale Manaslu peak in 1953, but when a second team followed in 1954 the villagers of Samagaun told them that the first team had been responsible for an avalanche that destroyed a monastery in the valley and refused to let the expedition continue.^{lvii} The Japanese funded the reconstruction of the monastery, but even still subsequent Japanese expeditions including the first successful ascent in 1954 occurred under a strained relationship with the local community.^{lviii}



Currently, the Samagaun people have come to accept the mountaineers that scale the peak behind their village and have even developed a system for porting equipment up to Base Camp that ensures equal participation among all community members. The Village District Committee (VDC)'s leaders who are the heads of the six wards in Samagaun facilitate a rotation system where each household has the chance to carry 30 kilograms of gear up the mountain every time a mountaineering team ascends to Base Camp. For this service, the porter representing each home receives 1500 Nepali rupees, a significant amount of money for one day's work.



Villagers gather to claim their loads and begin the climb up to Manaslu Base Camp.

Mountaineering expedition trekking in from Kathmandu, typically spend one to two days resting at the Manaslu Guesthouse while waiting for their gear to be brought in by pack mule. On the morning that their gear arrives, all the villagers congregate in the yard in front of the hotel, anxious to claim their loads and begin the five hour climb to Base Camp.

The VDC Representative circulates through the chaos keeping records in a book on the weight of each pile (which he measures with a handheld scale), its contents and the name of the individual carrying the load. In order to insure that each porter is held accountable for their load, he must also climb to Base where he meets the porters and takes an inventory of the goods they were responsible for before he hands over their payment. For his coordinating services, the VDC leaders also receive 1500 rupees, the same payment as those who carry loads.

Porters rest at Base Camp after delivering their loads before descending to the village.



During my fieldwork in Samagaun, I had the opportunity to watch the system in action on three separate mornings, one of which I joined the porters on their tedious climb to Base Camp. The scene outside of the Manaslu Hotel on these days is a bit chaotic, as porters lash on sacks of rice, lentils and canisters of fuel to climb up over the moraine to Manaslu. Women in long, wool skirts, head scarves and tennis shoes help each other load their woven bamboo baskets and hoist them onto each other's backs. If there are more bags left for the next day, and not all the villagers claim their weight, than another round will go up the following morning. The trek up and down the mountain takes a solid eight hours, so more than one trip is not possible in a single day. But at least for the day, one hundred families have a bag to carry and a small wad of cash in their pocket on the climb down. Although there is not "big money" in this system of porting, it is at least a fair and sustainable model that provides everyone with equal access to participate and generate a small amount of income.

Lack of Local Trekking Guides

Although the National Trust for Nature Conservation requires that all trekking and mountaineering groups have a licensed guide with them for the duration of their trek around the Manaslu Circuit, because I was conducting research in the region I was able to walk into Samagaun with a local guide who did not have his certification. My guide Ngodup Gyelzen, has lived in Samagaun his entire life and spent years leading yak caravans over the passes to trade with Tibet. He was the second person to build a guesthouse in Samagaun, and now owns two properties that service trekkers with food, lodging and camping. In the past few years he taught himself English in order to better communicate with the guests at his hotel and hopes to eventually obtain his guiding license if he can get sponsorship.

I was privileged to have Ngodup as my guide on my walk into Samagaun, for he grew up trekking up and down this valley and can answer all my questions about local culture and environment. During the six-day walk into the village he tells me stories about how the texture of communities and environment has changed with development over the decades. Ngodup also assures me that during my time in Samagaun he can take me up into hidden valleys, to monasteries nestled high in the mountains, caves where bears den and passes the yak caravans cross into Tibet. These are all places that a guide from Kathmandu would never know existed let alone how to reach them.

My first night on the trek in from Arughat I met Shawntel and Anna, two trekkers from the United States who happened to be following the same itinerary. When they found out that I was with a local guide who spoke English, they immediately begin asking Ngodup questions. Their own guide jumped in, offended that they are posing inquiries to Ngodup instead of him. I

imagine he must have been feeling pressure as a paid guide, expected to produce satisfying answers to his clients despite the fact he knows that he cannot compete with Ngodup's local wisdom.

Through the current system of obtaining guide certification, once an individual becomes licensed in Nepal they often work for a single company which sends them across the country on many different treks.^{lix} Many of the guides I met during my fieldwork had only been to the Manaslu region once or twice before, when they came as assistant guides. If, the Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal could set up an alternative system where trekking companies had access to a list of certified guides from each region of Nepal, companies could pair their clients with local guides based on availability. These freelancing guides could then market and sell their "expertise" on the region and make more money based on their local wisdom and relationship with the region and community.

I know how much I appreciated Ngodup's stories and perspective on change in the Manaslu Valley, and just from Shawntel and Anna's appreciation of what I could tell them second hand from Ngodup, demonstrates tourists' hunger for information about the local context. It's not that guides from other regions are "bad," they just cannot offer the same insight on the immediate culture and environment.

I mention to Ngodup that Anna and Shawntel have been talking about trekking up to Manaslu Base Camp on their day off in Sama and say I might join them since their guide does not want to go. "You make a program and I will take you," he instructs me. "We can take packed lunches." Ngodup clearly recognizes that he has something that he can market and tells me repeatedly over the course of my fieldwork that he wants to take guiding lessons in Kathmandu

to obtain his guiding certification this coming summer. When I get back to the United States I should send my friends to him, he says.

Challenges in Obtaining Guide Certification

In order to obtain one's trekking certification, the program takes a total of 35 days and costs 10,000 rupees, which is a significant amount of money particularly for individuals from rural communities in the interior of the country who practice subsistence farming.^{lx} Even if they are able to scrape together enough money, many are unable to abandon their families and farms for even a month to trek down to Kathmandu from their villages and take the necessary classes. As a result, there are currently no individuals from Samagaun who have licenses to guide.

I do, however, encounter Namgyal Ngodup Lama, a recently-licensed guide from the nearby Tsum Valley who is currently leading his first group of trekkers along the Manaslu Circuit.^{lxi} Similarly to my guide, Namgyal unofficially took two tourists to Tsum Valley last year, and from the experience, was motivated to pursue his guiding certification which he finished only five months ago.

"In Manaslu, like the Tsum Valley, many people are uneducated and there are not many guides," Namgyal explains. "However this year in the Tsum Valley, nine individuals graduated with their guide certification, doubling the number of certified guides who are from my valley." He believes a trend like this could easily happen in Manaslu, particularly in communities like Samagaun where there is already much more tourism than in Tsum Valley which only opened to trekking in 2008.^{lxii}

Local Participation in the Manaslu Mountaineering Industry

Similar to the trekking industry, community participation in guiding within the mountaineering industry is also quite limited. In fact, not a single person from Samagaun has ever climbed Mt. Manaslu. Ngodup admits that there is a lack of understanding among the local people regarding the mountaineering industry. “The villagers think the mountaineers are crazy,” he admits. “Some think the climbers must get a lot of money if they make it to the top.”^{lxiii} Ironically, mountaineers spend over 10,000 dollars in permits alone to spend a minimum of a month living on a mountain with no guarantee of even summiting.^{lxiv}



Manaslu Base Camp sits like a small city high in the blinding snows of the mountain.

While making a tour of Manaslu Base Camp and interviewing the seven expedition groups living on the mountain, I met Prem Gurung, who is the owner of the expedition company *Peak XV*.^{lxv} Originally from Lamjung, Prem is one of only four mountaineers from the Ghorka District, which the Manaslu Region falls under. Two of the mountaineers from this region are

senior guides who were Prem's teachers. The other two are his students who he trains through the mountaineering school he founded in conjunction with his company.



Interviewing Prem Gurung in one of his expedition tents at Manaslu Base Camp.

In order to promote local participation in the mountaineering industry, Prem is also active as an Instructor Member at the Nepal Mountaineering Association, a Training Committee Coordinator at the Nepal Mountaineering Instructor Association, and a Rescue & Research Committee Member at the Himalayan Rescue Association. When I ask how he became such a leader within the mountaineering industry, Prem says that when he was a young man he ran away from his village to find a job and ended up working as a porter. This was how he first got close to the mountains and became addicted to mountaineering.

“It is a real problem that local people are not involved in the mountaineering industry in a greater capacity,” he laments. “Mountain boys don’t have good educations. They are fit for mountaineering, but they need access to training.”

Although scholarships are available through the Nepal Mountaineering Association and Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal (TAAN), the process is long and tedious and if you want to benefit from the program you need MCAP to write you a recommendation letter.^{lxvi} However, after Basic Training it takes another five to seven years before one can be fully certified to lead and facilitate expeditions. Even still, many trekking guides dream of going on to obtain their mountaineering license. "You can make a lot more money as a mountaineering guide," shares Santosh Karki a trekking guide who works for a company based in Kathmandu. "It's the best job in Nepal!"^{lxvii}

For those who cannot afford to invest in years of training, the Nepal Mountaineering Association in collaboration with Himalayan Rescue Association has a rescue training program for mountain communities located near peaks that attract climbers.^{lxviii} Each year the program occurs in a different region of Nepal, and last year was facilitated in the Khumbu Region. If a community requests the training and can produce fifteen individuals interested in participating in the fifteen-day course, a village like Samagaun could be trained in rescue systems, immobilization and communication techniques, CPR and first aid skills.^{lxix} Although this would not make them eligible to work as guides, it would give them a solid base of skills which would allow them to participate in a greater capacity in the mountaineering industry and be more likely to receive scholarships for further training.

"In Nepal we have the capacity to really take control and lead these industries, but the politics are a struggle, the government's rules and permits," asserts Prem Gurung. "In order to get *this* community involved in the mountaineering industry that is active in their own backyard, it has to start with education."^{lxx} Eventually, once they know the industry and become active participants, they can begin to assert more power.

“If this community is clever they will ask for royalties from the government,” Prem suggests. By claiming ownership of the mountain, they could funnel this money into education programs that promote more community members becoming certified as guides who are able to lead the mountaineering industry. In the meantime, the value of porters as important players in the mountaineering industry should not be overlooked either. “The porters are our heroes!” Prem exclaims, “Without them we couldn’t climb at all.”



A porter climbs Mt.Manaslu as Samagaun and Biendra Lake sprawl in the valley below.

Recommendations for Potential Tourism Innovation in Samagaun

Clearly there is a lot of money and potential untapped in both the trekking and mountaineering industries of Samagaun. The following recommendations for tourism development were collected from local community members, trekkers and mountaineers along the Manaslu Circuit, as well as generated from my own experiences living in Samagaun and contact with the community.

1. Conflict Resolution and Relationship-Building among Organizations in Manaslu

The number one priority in insuring sustainable development and continued financial support for community initiatives from outside agencies should be to resolve conflict with MCAP and build stronger relationships with other organizations doing work in the region, namely the Sama Development Foundation and Nubri Culture and Youth Promotion Committee. By hosting meetings or even setting up conference calls with representatives from these groups, villagers could encourage better communication and coordination among these stakeholders. By having liaisons from the VDC responsible for communicating with each organization, the community of Samagaun could reduce tension between parallel efforts and promote more efficiency in the projects that are initiated by outside organizations in their community.

If all organizations doing work in the Manaslu region were brought together to discuss their interests and goals, perhaps each group could focus their efforts on a different aspect of development (i.e. tourism entrepreneurship, education, conservation, culture preservation, youth empowerment) and have greater impact in the community. Also employing a conflict resolution program could be beneficial in establishing healthier and more sustainable relationships between organizations and NGOs doing work in the region.

2. Day-Trip Programs with Local Guides on Tourists' Day Off

Presently most tourists will spend their acclimation day in Samagaun wandering up to Pung Gyen Monastery or Biendra Lake on their own, or if a group of porters is running a trip of gear up to Base Camp they might tag along. Until now, no one has found ways to creatively market side trips or programs to tourists where they can explore these high altitude valleys with a local guide. From the tourists I talked to, this is definitely something that is marketable and people are already looking for mini adventures around Samagaun on their „down day.“

Local guides could take trekkers to explore nearby valleys, visit Base Camp or Pung Gyen Monastery, or do a multi-day trip to Samdo and the Tibet border. Cultural programs could also be made available where tourists have the opportunity to do a traditional weaving workshop, learn about the process of making yak butter or local *chang*, or take a cooking lesson from the local Mothers Group.

Bir Bahadur Lama, the owner of Manaslu Hotel is already planning to develop such a program. He will do village orientations with tourists when they arrive at his hotel in the afternoon and tell them about programs they can do with local guides. The VDC could also set up a Tourism Development Committee that would take responsibility for organizing these daily orientations for groups of trekkers at the Manaslu Hotel (or another venue) during the main trekking season. This orientation program could include free tea and snacks to attract tourists and employ local historians to describe the village history, culture and natural environment. At the end of each orientation, groups would sign up for programs and day trips the following morning.

3. Promote Samagaun as a Destination

Through a partnership with the Nubri Culture and Youth Promotion Committee or the Nepal Tourism Board, the Samagaun community could initiate a campaign to market their village as a destination and not only a „stopover“ on the Manaslu Circuit. It is already functioning as a base for mountaineers on Mount Manaslu and a resting place for trekkers to acclimate to the altitude before climbing over Larkye Pass. However, after spending two weeks in Samagaun myself and needing the entire time to visit the local sites I wanted to see, I believe this village could attract foreign tourists who would come to Samagaun to spend several days or a week living with a family and exploring this Tibetan border region.

Also, for people who do not want to spend a week trekking into the village, the helicopter pad and service to Kathmandu would allow tourists with the budget to fly in and not have to exert any physical effort to reach Samagaun. However, to ensure that such tourism remains sustainable and does not erode participation of lower communities in the valley in the tourism industry, a „helicopter fee“ could be instituted that would feed money into cultural preservation programs throughout the valley.

4. Collective Handicraft Center and Gift Shop

Local handicrafts could be sold to tourists through a collective art center. This studio/shop could be housed in one of the guest houses, but ideally a community center for both the orientations and such a shop could be built through support from MCAP and the NTNC. Community members could rotate manning the shop, and local artists (i.e. weavers) could do demonstrations to attract tourists curious about the items for sale. A percentage of all sales could be kept in a fund that is used to preserve culture and host cultural events.

5. Set up Guesthouse Regulations to Distribute Tourists

Bir Bahadur Lama, the pioneer of the guesthouse industry in Samagaun, suggested that all hotel owners in the village form an association where they gather periodically and insure their guesthouses all meet certain standards. If all lodges in the village increased their standards, tourists could be divided among guesthouses. A limit could be instituted by the Village District Committee so that no guesthouse would be allowed to have more than twenty guests at a time if there were other accommodations with a vacancy in the village. “This system could be very efficient at distributing wealth,” insists Bir Bahadur. However, in order for such a system to be successful, all guesthouse owners would need to be critical of their own businesses and committed to the collective gain of the village.

6. Institute a Homestay Program

A Homestay Program in Samagaun could be developed by taking advantage of the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB)’s newly published Homestay Guidelines. Although MCAP and NTB have not done any trainings on homestay development in this community, Samagaun could request such a workshop if enough households in the community were interested in participating. A successful Homestay Program would offer more members of the Samagaun community the chance to generate income off of trekkers rather than the few who can afford to construct guesthouses. A rotation system (similar to the porter system in place for carrying loads to Manaslu Base Camp) could be orchestrated by the VDC to insure equal participation. This way the whole community could benefit from tourism while also giving trekkers the „authentic“ and

intimate cultural experiences that they are seeking from their trek and experience in the Manaslu region.

7. Adult Education Programs in Social Entrepreneurship

An adult education program that focuses on social entrepreneurship and business/management skills would be beneficial to engage the adult population of the Samagaun community and inspire them to participate and guide the direction of tourism in their own backyard. Programming could include workshops in guesthouse management, finance, marketing, and English language. Again the National Trust for Nature Conservation, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, or another organization that seeks to empower rural communities could facilitate this initially and eventually turn it over to local community members to lead and train each other.

8. Sponsorship Program to Encourage Local Youth to Become Certified as Guides

The Village District Committee's Tourism Development Committee could set up a sponsorship program to send local youth to Kathmandu to get their Trekking and Basic Mountain Guide Training certifications. After completing the course, they could come back and either work for a trekking company doing Manaslu Circuit treks or serve as a local guide in the Samagaun valley doing day trips for a year to pay the community back for their investment. This would inspire others to participate in the program.

9. Publish a Guidebook for the Manaslu Region and Locally-Produced Map

There is very limited published material on the Manaslu Circuit other than sections in trekking guidebooks and one booklet exclusively on the Manaslu Region which was published by a foreigner in the 1990s and is now quite outdated. Even the recently updated maps that I carried with me to Samagaun had names that were inaccurate and misspelled when I showed them to natives of the region.

If VDC Tourism Development Committees partnered with the Nubri Culture and Youth Promotion Committee of the Nepal Tourism Board they could publish a guidebook and accurate map of their region. Employing people native to the region in the process would ensure that local names were used and that the places the communities wanted highlighted were incorporated in the data. Profit generated from the sale of such materials could also be used to develop sustainable tourism in communities along the Circuit or sponsor local youth to become guides.

10. Outdoor Education Programs in the Manaslu Context

Samagaun could request that Outward Bound or the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) come to their village and do trainings in outdoor education, backpacking, and mountaineering rather than having all educational programs occurring in Kathmandu which often does not lead to a sustainable return of educated individuals participating in the industry. Having programs in Samagaun and in the surrounding region would also spark curiosity and local interest in participating in more extended programs. Also having an international organization like NOLS or Outward Bound employ their solid, and long-established program (especially if Educators Courses were offered) would help to build a local community of educated individuals that could then train others and adapt this international model to the needs of the local community and the outdoor adventure situation in Manaslu.

11. Host a Mountain Rescue Program through NMA and NMAHRA

The Samagaun community should build interest and organize fifteen individuals to host a program through the Nepal Mountaineering Association the Nepal Mountaineering Association and Himalayan Rescue Association to have the community trained in mountain rescue. This would increase the village's understanding of mountaineering and assist them in having a more active role in the industry.

12. Claim Royalties from the Mountaineering Industry on Mt. Manaslu

Through increased participation in the outdoor tourism industry, the people of Samagaun may eventually be able to take ownership of the mountaineering industry on Mount Manaslu. By demanding that the Samagaun VDC receive royalties from the mountaineering teams, this money could be used for cultural preservation, conservation and education programs in the community. This however, would involve intense commitment and pressure from within the local community on regional and national organizations that would be resistant to giving up their domination of the industry. This may be a long-term goal that evolves as a result of smaller efforts that build over time as the local community takes greater agency over the tourism industry in their region.

Conclusion

Regardless of what infrastructure is in place or how engaged the people of Samagaun are in the outdoor tourism industry, the number of visitors to the Manaslu region is only going to rise. The people who live in the communities along the Manaslu Circuit can either choose to be proactive about finding ways to participate more directly in the trekking and mountaineering industries expanding in their backyard, or let outsiders come in to offer the services they are not able to provide. Rather than be swept away by rapid change or depend on assistance from external organizations that do not necessarily understand their needs and goals, communities like Samagaun must take the future of their village into their own hands. They must claim ownership of the trekking and mountaineering industries in their regions, and design systems that keep the benefits of tourism close to home while simultaneously protecting the best of their culture and environment.

Methodology

In order to conduct this study over the course of a four-week period, I spent the first week conducting interviews with organizations and agencies in Kathmandu who do work in rural communities like Samagaun in order to understand the perspective of these groups and the nature of the work they do to alleviate poverty in rural communities. Such organizations and individuals included the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), the Dutch development agency SNV, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), faculty at Tribhuvan University in the Central Department of Rural Development, the Nepal Tourism Board and the Kathmandu headquarters of the Nubri Culture and Youth Promotion Committee (NCYPC). Informed on the objectives of international/national organizations, I then entered Samagaun, one of the rural communities such organizations strive to serve.

The trek into Samagaun along the Manaslu Circuit took a total of 6-days including one day on a bus from Kathmandu to Arughat. During the walk in to the village I had the company of Ngodup Gyelzen who guided me to my destination and shared invaluable knowledge about physical and social changes in the region as a result of expanding tourism. Along the route to Samagaun, I interviewed MCAP representatives stationed along the trail, the owners of guesthouses, as well as other trekkers.

Upon arriving in Samagaun, I met my Research Assistant and Translator, Pasang Dolma, (Ngodup's niece) who had assisted me in organizing my trip to Samagaun. She was my constant companion during my 12-day stay in the village, assisting in interviews with guesthouse and restaurant owners, local villagers, trekking and mountaineering guides, etc. I stayed at Ngodup's "Peaceful Acres" guesthouse for these two weeks and spent many afternoons and evenings at

other guesthouses in the village chatting with mountaineers, trekkers and guides around stoves heated with yak dung.

Because Pasang is also a teacher at the local school, I spent a great deal of my free time with the students and learned about the system of education in rural communities like Samagaun. In the company of Ngodup, I was able to explore the valleys around Samagaun including Pung Gyen Monastery, Biendra Lake, Manaslu Base Campe and the Tibet border. These are all destinations that very few tourists have the chance to experience but could be marketed as a day trips if Samagaun sets up a system with local guides.

List of Interviews (According to Date)

1. February 19, 2011. Nubri Culture and Youth Promotion Committee, Swayambhu Office, Kathmandu.
2. March 4, 2011. Ratna Raj Timsina, Program Coordinator, National Trust for Nature Conservation, Kathmandu.
3. March 6, 2011. Tribhuvan University, Central Department of Rural Development Faculty, Kathmandu.
4. April 5, 2011. Mim Hamal: SNV Dutch Development Organization, Kathmandu.
5. April 5, 2011. Raj Bajgain, Gorkha Encounters, Thamel, Kathmandu.
6. April 5, 2011. Milan Rai, Bothi-Bothi Trekking office, Kathmandu.
7. April 6, 2011. Lila Mahadin Banya, Nepal Tourism Board, Kathmandu.
8. April 6, 2011. Ula Jigme Lama, Committee President, Sama Development Foundation, Kathmandu.
9. April 7, 2011. Siddhartha Bajra Charya, Chief, National Trust for Nature Conservation, Kathmandu.
10. April 7, 2011. Ester Kruk, Tourism Specialist, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Kathmandu.
1. April 9, 2011. Shawntel and Anna, ABC Hotel, Sothi Khola.
2. April 9, 2011. Santosh Karki, Hotel ABC, Sothi Khola.
3. April 11, 2011. Ishwar Gurung, MCAP Checkpost, Jagat.
4. April 11, 2011. Bhim Prasad Upadhyay, Natural Resources Conservation Assistant, MCAP, Philim.
5. April 11, 2011. Stephen Kocher, Swiss-Nepal Family Trekking and Expedition, Owner. Philim.
6. April 15, 2011. Bir Bahadur Lama, Headmaster. Shree Guari Shankar Primary School, Samagaun.
7. April 15, 2011. Dawa Norbu, Teacher. Shreee Guari Shankar Primary School, Samagaun.
8. April 16, 2011. Bella Johnson, Trekker. Community Campsite, Samagaun.
9. April 18, 2011. Village Meeting at the Shree Guari Shankar Primary School, Samagaun.

10. April 18, 2011. Gyatsen Lama and Lhakpa Gyezzan, Owners. Samagaun Hotel and Lode Campsite, Samagaun.
 11. April 19, 2011. Alireza Behpour, Iraj Maani, and Mahmoud Hashemi, Iranian Mountaineering Team, Manaslu Hotel, Samagaun.
 12. April 19, 2011. Police Checkpost in Samagaun.
 13. April 20, 2011. Bir Bahadur Lama, Manaslu Hotel, Samagaun.
 14. April 20, 2011. Norbu Hotel. Ngodup Gyelzen. Content: History of Pung Gyen Gompa and potential as local sidetrip for tourists.
 15. April 21, 2011. Police Checkpost in Samagaun. Content:
 16. April 21, 2011. Pasang Dolma, Pema Choling Monastery and Biendra Lake, Samagaun.
 17. April 21, 2011. . Namgyal Ngodup Lama, Guide from Tsum Valley, Manaslu Hotel.
 18. April 22, 2011. Visit to Manaslu Base Camp. Interview all Climbing Teams.
 19. April 22, 2011. Prem Gurung, Owner and Guide of “Peak XV” Mountaineering Company. Manaslu Base Camp.
 20. April 22, 2011. Ngodup Gyelzen, Norbu Hotel, Samagaun.
 21. April 23, 2011. PHASE Health Clinic, Samagaun.
 22. April 23, 2011. Chodak, Tibetan teacher and community member, Yak Hotel, Samdo.
 23. April 23, 2011. Sunil Tamang, Trek for Change 2011, Yak Hotel, Samdo.
 24. April 24, 2011. Prem Gurung, NMA Instructor Member; HRA, Rescue & Research Committee Member; NNMGA, Board Member; NMIA, Board Member and Training Committee Coordinator. Manaslu Hotel, Samagaun.
 25. April 25, 2011. Dharke Tsering Hiraghan, Samagaun.
 26. April 25, 2011. Dawa Norbu, Student of SEEDS Sponsorship Program, Samagaun.
 27. April 25, 2011. Bir Bahadur Lama, Manaslu Hotel, Samagaun.
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Suggestions for Future Research

Although I did some investigation of the stakeholders in rural development and organizations actively engaged in promoting sustainable tourism, this aspect of my paper was moved to the background as I focused on community of Samagaun. A study conducted exclusively on the „politics of tourism and rural development“ based in Kathmandu would be very insightful and function as a database as a more holistic picture of the expanding outdoor tourism industry is created. I would suggest offering profiles of the various stakeholders in tourism and rural development, their roles, goals, conflicting interests, etc.

For such a study I would recommend speaking with representatives at the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the Dutch development agency SNV, the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), and the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. An Independent Study Project structured as an internship at any of these organizations or agencies would also offer insight into how effectively such organizations function and give a intimate and more fair portrayal of the work they do.

Another piece of the „rural tourism and development“ puzzle that needs to be more fully studied is the system of Heritage Trails that follows the ancient north-southbound trade routes through Tibet, Nepal and India. The Rasuwa Tamang Heritage Trail is currently one of the newest trekking trails in Nepal and is being promoted by ICIMOD as well as the Nepal Tourism Board. This system of „reinventing“ and marketing ancient paths to tourists would be an interesting process to document (which ones are prioritized, the language that is used to appeal to outdoor adventurers, etc.).

Similarly, the continued development of the Great Himalayan Trail should be documented as certain organizations initiating the proposal hand it over to trekking agencies, outside promoters and the village communities themselves to develop. There are currently many permit restrictions, political structures and lack of awareness and infrastructure that are barring its rapid progression but it will be interesting to see which communities take its development into their own hands.

Finally, an investigation of the status of tourism in the Tsum Valley (which branches off of the Manaslu Circuit) would assist in documenting the spectrum of regions across Nepal and their various stages of development. The Tsum Valley was only opened to tourists in 2008, and already is attracting tourists who feel that the Manaslu Circuit is becoming too heavily-trafficked. The same relationship that the Manaslu Conservation Area has with Annapurna Conservation Area (a gap of ten years or so in development), now exists between Manaslu and the Tsum Valley.

Feel free to contact me if you have further questions about my investigation of outdoor tourism in the Manaslu region or any of my suggestions for continued study.

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Standing at Manaslu Base Camp with my Research Assistant, Pasang Dolma.

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